

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 BRIDGETOWN 1672

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PGOV, PINR, BB

SUBJ: GENERAL ELECTIONS -- ON THE EVE

REF: BRIDGETOWN 1591

SUMMARY: INTEREST IN POLITICS ON THE ISLAND, USUALLY HIGH BEFORE GENERAL ELECTIONS, IS PARTICULARLY SO AS THE NEXT ONES APPROACH. THE RULING DEMOCRATIC LABOUR PARTY, IN OFFICE FOR THE LAST 15 YEARS, FACES A STRONG CHALLENGE FROM THE OPPOSITION BARBADOS LABOUR PARTY. SOME 134 THOUSAND OF THE BARBADOS ALMOST ONE QUARTER OF A MILLION INHABITANTS ARE REGISTERED TO VOTE, AND THE TURN-OUT, WHICH HAS BEEN INCREASING OVER THE YEARS, IS EXPECTED TO BE MORE THAN 80 PERCENT. ANOTHER TREND -- THAT OF THE INCREASING DOMINANCE OF THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES IN BARBADIAN POLITICS AT THE EXPENSE OF THIRD PARTIES, IS ALSO EXPECTED TO CONTINUE. THERE ARE 60 CANDIDATES ENTERED FOR THE 24-SEAT HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY: THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES HAVE CANDIDATES FOR ALL THE CONSTITUENCIES, A THIRD PARTY--THE PEOPLE'S POLITICAL ALLIANCE --

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WILL CONTEST EIGHT CONSTITUENCIES AND THERE ARE FOUR OTHER

CANDIDATES, THREE INDEPENDENTS AND ONE MEMBER OF THE PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE SOCIALIST PARTY. NONE BUT THE CANDIDATES OF THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES AND ONE OF THE INDEPENDENTS -- A RECENT DEFECTOR FROM THE DLP -- HAVE A HOPE OF WINNING. THERE IS WIDESPREAD FEELING AMONG ALL CLASSES THAT THE TIDE HAS TURNED AGAINST THE RULING PARTY, THAT THE DLP WILL AND SHOULD BE VOTED OUT. THE CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN MARRED BY UNCHARACTERISTIC HARRASSMENT OF SPEAKERS AND SOME MINOR VIOLENCE.

PRIME MINISTER ERROL BARROW -- "THE DIPPER SKIPPER", AS HIS SUPPORTERS UNFELICITOUSLY HAVE REFERRED TO HIM IN THIS AND PREVIOUS CAMPAIGNS -- LOOMS LARGE IN HIS PARTY, AND A VOTER IS MORE INCLINED IN HIS DECISION BY AN ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE MAN THAN HIS PARTY. THE BLP, ON THE OTHER HAND, AND ALTHOUGH J.M.G. (TOM) ADAMS IS UNDOUBTEDLY IN CHARGE AND TO THE FORE, HAS TWO OTHER LEADING LIGHTS, SENATOR BERNARD ST. JOHN AND MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY, HENRY FORDE.

BOTH PARTIES HAVE JUST ISSUED THEIR MANIFESTOS, AND BOTH ARE CONCERNED ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY WITH DOMESTIC AFFAIRS AND WITHOUT NOTABLE CONTENT. END SUMMARY

1. THE GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN IS NOW IN ITS FINAL DAYS, WITH POLLING TO TAKE PLACE ON SEPTEMBER 2. IT HAS BEEN A SHORT CAMPAIGN, REALLY ONLY BEGINNING AFTER MID-AUGUST (THE DEATH OF GOVERNOR GENERAL SIR WINSTON SCOTT THIS MONTH CURTAILED IT SOMEWHAT) BUT IT HAS BEEN INTENSE. THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES, THE RULING DEMOCRATIC LABOUR PARTY AND THE OPPOSITION BARBADOS LABOUR PARTY, HAVE FOR THE PAST TWO WEEKS BEEN HOLDING AT LEAST A HALF-DOZEN OUTDOOR PUBLIC MEETINGS A NIGHT THROUGHOUT THE ISLAND. CANDIDATES, ESPECIALLY THE LEADING FIGURES OF THE TWO PARTIES, INCLUDING PRIME MINISTER ERROL BARROW AND BLP LEADER J.M.G. "TOM" ADAMS, GENERALLY MANAGE TO SPEAK AT AT LEAST THREE OF THEIR PARTIES MEETINGS EVERY NIGHT. AND ALL THIS IS TAKING PLACE AT THE HOTTEST, MOST HUMID TIME OF THE YEAR.

2. THERE IS CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC INTEREST IN THE ELECTIONS. BARBADIANS USUALLY DERIVE MUCH ENTERTAINMENT FROM THE PLAY OF POLITICS, ESPECIALLY THE CLASH OF POLITICAL PERSONALITIES AND CONFIDENTIAL

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THE HUMOR THIS TOUCHES OFF. THIS YEAR THE INTEREST IS HEIGHTENED BY WHAT APPEARS TO BE A VERY CLOSE RACE. MORE THAN 134 THOUSAND OF THE ISLAND'S 239 THOUSAND PEOPLE ARE REGISTERED TO VOTE, COMPARED WITH THE MORE THAN 115 THOUSAND REGISTERED FOR THE LAST GENERAL ELECTIONS IN 1971. THE HIGH TURNOUTS OF RECENT ELECTIONS (84.5 PERCENT IN 1974) IS EXPECTED TO CONTINUE. THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES HAVE CANDIDATES STANDING FOR ALL TWENTY-FOUR CONSTITUENCIES OF THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY.

(THE ISLAND'S SENATE OF 21 MEMBERS IS AN APPOINTIVE BODY.)
A THIRD PARTY FORMED OF THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT
AND THE PEOPLE'S PRESSURE GROUP, THEMSELVES THIRD PARTIS
WHICH HAVE COME INTO BEING SINCE THE LAST GENERAL ELECTIONS
AND WHICH INDIVIDUALLY MADE SUCH POOR SHOWINGS IN THE TWO
BY-ELECTIONS THIS YEAR CALLED THE PEOPLE'S POLITICAL ALLIANCE,
HAS PUT FORWARD CANDIDATES FOR EIGHT OF THE TWENTY-FOUR CON-
STITUENCIES. THERE ARE FOUR OTHER CANDIDATES, THREE INDE-
PENDENTS AND ONE VETERAN CAMPAIGNER CARRYING THE BANNER OF
THE PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE SOCIALIST PARTY INTO THE CONTEST.
THUS THERE ARE SIXTY CANDIDATES IN ALL, BUT NONE BUT THE 24
FROM THE DLP AND THE 24 FROM THE BLP, AND ONE OF THE INDE-
PENDENTS -- MRS. GERTRUDE EASTMOND, WHO AS A MEMBER OF THE
HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY DEFECTED FROM THE DLP IN MARCH AND IS RUNNING
FOR HER SEAT ON HER OWN THIS TIME-- IS CONSIDERED TO HAVE A
CHANCE OF WINNING. THIS CONTINUES THE TREND IN BARBADIAN POLI-
TICS WHEREBY THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES TOGETHER HAVE TAKEN AN IN-
CREASING SHARE OF THE TOTAL VOTE, BEGINNING IN 1956 -- THE
FIRST GENERAL ELECTION CONTESTED BY THE THEN NEWLY FORMED DLP --
WHEN BOTH PARTIES TOGETHER GAINED 69.2 PERCENT OF THE VOTE, AND
THE 1971 ELECTIONS, IN WHICH THEY GAINED 99.8 PERCENT. (ACTUALLY
THERE COULD BE A TECHNICAL REVERSAL OF THE TREND WITH MRS.
EASTMOND RUNNING AS AN INDEPENDENT, BUT THIS WILL BE AN ISO-
LATED PHENOMENA NOT INDICATIVE OF A OVERALL TREND AWAY FROM TWO-
PARTY POLITICS ON THE ISLAND.)

3. UNDER THE BARBADOS PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM OF GOVERN-
MENT, THE PARTY LEADER GAINING THE GREATEST NUMBER OF
SEATS IN THE GENERAL ELECTION IS USUALLY CALLED UPON BY
THE HEAD OF STATE OR HIS REPRESENTATIVE -- IN BARBADOS
THE GOVERNOR GENERAL ACTING FOR THE QUEEN TO FORM A
GOVERNMENT. SINCE THE INTRODUCTION OF UNIVERSAL SUFF-
FRAGE, THE BLP WON THE ELECTIONS IN 1951 (PRIOR TO THE
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EXISTENCE OF THE DLP) AND 1956. THE DLP HAS WON THE THREE
GENERAL ELECTIONS SINCE -- 1961, 1966 AND 1971. IN
BARBADOS' FORM OF GOVERNMENT IT IS POSSIBLE FOR A PARTY TO
OBTAIN A GREATER POPULAR VOTE THAN ANY OTHER PARTY AND YET
LOSE THE ELECTION. IN FACT, THAT OCCURRED IN 1966, WHEN
THE BLP, WITH 36.8 OF THE VOTE, ACTUALLY WON ONLY 5 SEATS,
WHILE THE DLP, WITH 36.3 OF THE VOTE, WON 14 SEATS (WITH 4
SEATS GOING TO THE NOW DEFUNCT BARBADOS NATIONAL PARTY AND
ONE TO AN INDEPENDENT).

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 BRIDGETOWN 1672

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4. FROM THE OUTSET OF THE YEAR, ONE SENSED A TIDE RUNNING AGAINST THE RULING PARTY. THERE WERE TWO BY-ELECTIONS, IN THE FIRST OF WHICH (IN FEBRUARY) THE BLP CANDIDATE WAS ELECTED TO REPLACE A DLP MEMBER, THE FORMER SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE, WHO HAD BEEN REMOVED FROM OFFICE FOR BANKRUPTCY; AND THE MAY BY-ELECTION, IN WHICH A POPULAR YOUNG BLP WOMAN LAWYER WAS ELECTED TO FILL THE VACANCY IN THE BRIDGETOWN CONSTITUENCY CREATED BY THE ACCEPTANCE BY A BLP MEMBER OF THE CONSUL GENERALSHIP IN NEW YORK. BETWEEN THESE BY-ELECTIONS, A DLP MEMBER, GERTRUDE EASTMOND DEFECTED FROM THE PARTY, CHARGING THAT IT DID NOT GIVE SUFFICIENT ATTENTION TO WOMEN. AS A RESULT OF THEIR 1971 VICTORY, IN WHICH THEY GAINED 57.4 PERCENT OF THE POPULAR VOTE TO THE BLP'S 42.4, THE DLP HELD 18 OF THE 24 SEATS. THIS YEARS FALL IN THEIR

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FORTUNES HAS REDUCED THEM TO 16, WITH 7 BLP MEMBERS AND ONE INDEPENDENT COMPRISING THE HOUSE MEMBERSHIP. TALK IS HEARD THROUGHOUT THE ISLAND FROM MEMBERS OF ALL CLASSES THAT AFTER HAVING GOVERNED FOR 15 YEARS THE DLP WILL, AND SHOULD BE VOTED OUT. THE BLP HAS USUALLY ATTRACTED MORE MEMBERS OF THE MIDDLE CLASS THAN HAVE THEIR RIVAL PARTY. WITH THIS TRADITIONAL SUPPORT THIS YEAR THE BLP SEEMS ALSO TO BE STRONG AMONG THE LOWER ECONOMIC CLASSES OF BARBADIAN SOCIETY--THE GREAT MASS OF THE PEOPLE. THROUGH THE VICTORY OF BILLIE MILLER IN THE CITY BY-ELECTION THE BLP ALSO SEEM TO HAVE CAUGHT THE IMAGINATION OF THE WOMAN VOTERS, WHO OUTNUMBER THE MEN. ONE OF THE THREE MOST PROMINENT FIGURES OF THE OPPOSITION, MEMBER OF THE ASSEMBLY HENRY FORDE, TAKES EVERY OPPORTUNITY BEFORE THE PUBLIC TO EMPHASIS HIS PARTY'S CONCERN FOR JUSTICE FOR WOMEN. THE BLP ARE CAUGHT UP IN THE PROSPECT OF VICTORY; ONE BLP MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY PREDICTED TO AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT HIS PARTY COULD WIN AS MANY AS 18 SEATS, AND HE PROBABLY BELIEVED WHAT HE SAID. THE MOMENTUM SEEMS TO BE WITH THE BLP, WHILE THE DLP IS OFF-BALANCED EVEN BY THEIR CAMPAIGN SLOGANS. PRIMIN BARROW IS NICKNAMED "DIPPER." WHEN IN 1971, HIS SUPPORTED URGED VOTERS TO "KEEP THE DIPPER SKIPPER" NONE IN THOSE ECONOMICALLY HAPPIER DAYS ON BARBADOS TOOK EXCEPTION TO THIS UNFELICITOUS SLOGAN. NOW, IN 1976, WITH INFLATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT AT SEVERE LEVELS, WITH WIDESPREAD BELIEF THAT BARROW AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT HAVE UNJUSTLY ENRICHED BY VIRTUE OF THEIR OFFICE, TO BE TOLD THAT "THINGS GO BETTER WITH DIPPER" EVOKES DERISIONS. "DITCH THE DIPPER, SINK THE SKIPPER" IS THE LAUGHING RESPONSE OF BARROW'S OPPONENTS.

5. BARBADIANS WHO HAVE PRIDED THEMSELVES OF THE ISLAND'S ORDERLY PROCESSES OF GOVERNMENT, ITS HISTORY OF POLITICAL FAIRPLAY, LAMENT EVIDENCES OF UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT AND EVEN MINOR VIOLENCE THAT HAVE APPEARED IN THIS CAMPAIGN. TWO WEEKS AGO, LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION ADAMS WAS PREVENTED FROM CONTINUING HIS TALK TO THOSE WHO HAD GATHERED ONE EVENING TO HEAR HIM, AND OTHER BLP CANDIDATES, BY THE ORGANIZED HECKLING OF YOUTHFUL DLP SUPPORTERS -- THE YOUNG DEMOCRATIC LEAGUE--WHICH DROWNED HIM OUT. THEN THERE WAS THE STILL CONFIDENTIAL

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UNEXPLAINED EXPLOSION AT ANOTHER DLP MEETING, WHICH CAUSED NO CASUALTIES OR DAMAGE. CANDIDATES OF BOTH PARTIES CLAIM TO HAVE BEEN BARELY MISSED BY ROCKS THROWN AT THEM WHILE ON THE HUSTINGS. ON BALANCE, THE BLP IN ALL THIS IS SEEN AS MORE VICTIM THAN PERPETRATOR AND THE ISLAND'S SOLE DAILY NEWSPAPER, THE ADVOCATE-NEWS, DELIVERED A LECTURE FROM ITS EDITORIAL PAGE ON THE SUBJECT OF HARRASSMENT, A LECTURE

ADDRESSED TO THE DLP AND MEMBERS OF THEIR YOUNG DEMOCRATIC LEAGUE MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE.

6. SINCE A BLP VICTORY ON SEPTEMBER 2 IS A DISTINCT POSSIBILITY, IT WOULD BE WELL TO LOOK AT THE PARTY'S THREE LEADING FIGURES. THE BARBADOS LABOR PARTY IS OFTEN REFERRED TO SIMPLY AS "THE LABOUR PARTY," EVEN THOUGH BOTH MAJOR PARTIES HAVE THE WORD "LABOUR" IN THEIR NAME. THIS IS A CARRY-OVER FROM THE TIME WHEN COLONIAL BARBADOS HAD A CONSERVATIVE PARTY, REPRESENTING THE INTERESTS OF THE PLANTERS AND THE WHITE (THEN RULING) POPULATION GENERALLY, AND A LABOUR PARTY - THIS SAME BLP --- REPRESENTING THE BLACK POPULATION, OR THAT OF IT THAT WAS EMERGING. WHILE THE CURRENT DLP CAN BE SUMMED UP IN THE PERSONALITY OF BARROW HIMSELF, SINCE HE RULES THE PARTY AUTOCRATICALLY, THE BLP HAS THREE LEADING FIGURES, ITS CHAIRMAN AND PARLIAMENTARY CHIEF, JOHN MATTHEW GEOFFREY MANNINGHAM "TOM" ADAMS, SENATOR BERNARD "BRIE" ST. JOHN, AND MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY HENRY FORDE. ON THE RETIREMENT OF THE LATE SIR GRANTLEY ADAMS IN 1970, ST. JOHN, THEN A MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY, BECAME FOR A TIME PARTY CHIEF. ST. JOHN LOST HIS SEAT IN THE 1971 ELECTION AND SIR GRANTLEY'S SON, TOM, TOOK OVER. ST. JOHN, WHO HAS SINCE SERVED IN THE APPOINTIVE OFFICE OF SENATOR, IS ATTEMPTING TO REGAIN HIS SEAT IN THAT FAR MORE IMPORTANT LEGISLATIVE BODY, THE HOUSE.

7. IN THE CAMPAIGN THE DLP HAVE POINTED TO WHAT THEY CONTEND IS A DIVISION OF LEADERSHIP IN THE BLP BETWEEN ST. JOHN AND ADAMS, AND WARNED VOTERS THAT A PARTY OF SUCH DIVIDED LEADERSHIP DOES NOT MERIT SUPPORT. INDEED ADAMS AND ST. JOHN ARE RIVALS, AND ONE OFTEN HEARS IT SAID BY BLP SUPPORTERS THAT ST. JOHN AND NOT ADAMS SHOULD LEAD THE PARTY AND EVEN THE COUNTRY. ADAMS THOUGH COMMANDS A GREAT DEAL OF RESPECT, AND NOT ONLY BECAUSE HE IS HIS CONFIDENTIAL

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FATHERS SON. AT 44, HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF THE HOUSE SINCE 1966, AND BEFORE THAT A SCRIPT WRITER FOR THE BBC IN LONDON. HE HAS AN UNMISTAKABLE OXFORD MANNER -- HE WAS AT MAGDALEN-- IS TALL, LEAN AND SLIGHTLY STOOPED-- A DISRAELIAN FIGURE. ADAMS, WHOSE FATHER WAS PRIMARILY OF AFRICAN ANCESTRY AND WHOSE MOTHER IS ENGLISH, IS LIGHT OF COLOR. HE IS MARRIED TO AN ENGLISHWOMAN. HE IS BOOKISH, STAMP COLLECTING AND THAT GREATEST OF ALL SPORTSMEN, THE ONE WHO DOES NOT PARTICIPATE BUT SPECTATES AND CHRONICLES THE DOINGS OF ATHLETES.

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8. ST. JOHN IS OBVIOUSLY BLACK. HE GRADUATED FROM LONDON UNIVERSITY, WHERE HE READ LAW. LIKE ADAMS, HE IS 44 AND ENTERED THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY IN 1966. HE IS CONVIVIAL, A FREQUENTER OF THE RUM SHOPS, SOME SAY TOO FOND OF STRONG DRINK. ST. JOHN AS A POLITICIAN HAS THE REPUTATION OF A GOOD PERFORMER IN THE TRADITIONAL SENSE: HELPING INDIVIDUAL CONSTITUENTS.

9. HENRY FORDE IS A MUCH RESPECTED POLITICIAN AND LAWYER. HE TOO ENTERED THE HOUSE IN 1966 AND IS SLIGHTLY YOUNGER THAN ADAMS AND ST. JOHN. FORDE GRADUATED FROM CAMBRIDGE; HE IS NOT IN COMPETITION WITH THEM FOR THE PARTY LEADERSHIP BUT WOULD BE NEXT IN LINE IF THESE TWO WERE TO FAIL TO WIN ELECTIONS OR TO LEAVE THE SCENE FOR SOME OTHER REASON. FORDE IS THE SHADOW MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS ALTHOUGH HE TOLD EMBASSY OFFICERS SEVERAL MONTHS AGO THAT IF THE BLP GAIN THE GOVERNMENT ADAMS HIMSELF, BECAUSE OF HIS INTEREST IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS, WAS LIKELY TO ASSUME THAT PORTFOLIO.

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10. THE TWO PARTIES HAVE NOW ISSUED THEIR MANIFESTOS, THE BLP ON AUGUST 27 AND THE DLP THE FOLLOWING DAY. BOTH MANIFESTOS ARE CONCERNED ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY WITH DOMESTIC MATTERS. THE BLP DOES STATE ITS INTENTION TO PROMOTE FURTHER INTEGRATION WITHIN THE CARIBBEAN WHILE RESTATING ITS DESIRE TO RENEGOTIATE THE CARICOM AGREEMENT, WITH WHICH IT HAS IN THE PAST COMPLAINED OF AS BEING DISADVANTAGEOUS TO BARBADOS. THE BLP ALSO PROMISES TO REDUCE THE COST OF THE ISLAND'S DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATION ABROAD AND TO ORIENT THE FOREIGN SERVICE TOWARDS THE PROMOTION OF ITS ECONOMIC INTEREST. THE DLP IN ITS MANIFESTO SEE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AS THE MAIN GOAL OF FOREIGN POLICY AND WILL "RESTRUCTURE" THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND THE MISSIONS ABROAD" IN KEEPING WITH THIS CHANGE OF EMPHASIS IN THEIR ROLE. THE RULING PARTY ALSO STATES ITS SUPPORT FOR WESTERN HEMISPHERE COOPERATION AND ITS ADHERENCE TO THIRD WORLD ECONOMIC GOALS.

11. CONCERNING THE MANIFESTOS THEMSELVES, THE BLP HAS CALLED ATTENTION TO THE GLOSSY PAMPHLET OF THE DLP IN THE NATIONAL COLORS AND COMPARED IT WITH THEIR OWN MODEST PRESENTATION, THE FORMER PRINTED IN MIAMI, THEIRS IN BARBADOS. THIS PREFERENCE FOR NATIONAL PRINTERS ACCORDS PERFECTLY WITH THE BLP MANIFESTO CONTENT-THAT UNEMPLOYMENT IS THE MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM FACING BARBADOS AND THAT THE PARTY WILL DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO CREATE JOBS.

12. IN THE EMBASSY'S FIRST REPORT ON THE GENERAL ELECTIONS, WE PREDICTED THAT THE RACE WOULD BE CLOSE BUT THAT THE BLP WERE A SLIGHT FAVORITE. WE SAW NO US INTEREST BEING ADVERSELY AFFECTED BY THE OUTCOME. BY AND LARGE, THE RULING DLP HAS SUPPORTED THE OBJECTIVES OF US FOREIGN POLICY. A BLP VICTORY WOULD BE EXPECTED TO CONTINUE THE SAME COURSE, WITH MINOR VARIATIONS.
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